



~THE BOOK OF GALATIANS, PART 1~  
~AN OVERVIEW AND SURVEY~  
~ROUTE 66~



**Book:** The Book of Galatians is a defense of the true Gospel of Jesus Christ and a challenge to legalists, individuals who add to the Good News or try to hinder people's walk by setting up manmade rules. Paul spends time refuting Judaizers, legalistic Jews, who were trying to bring believers under the OT Law.

**Author:** The author is Paul. That is rarely debated.

Let's first consider the internal evidence. **One**, the author claims to be Paul (**Gal. 1:1-2; Gal. 5:2**). **Two**, the character of the book is what we call "Pauline", seen in the writing style and theological vocabulary. **Three**, the content of the book is the style of Paul, stressing the grace of God and deliverance from the Law. **Four**, events discussed in Galatians tied with the history as found Acts shows it is Pauline (see **Acts 11-16 and Gal. 1-2**).

Now the external evidence. **One**, earliest MSS of the book have Paul's name. **Two**, citations from Romans are found in writings of the Church Fathers. This includes Polycarp, Tertullian, Justin Martyr, and Irenaeus. **Three**, even critics who do not agree with the inspiration of Scripture do note that Paul wrote it.

**When It Was Written:** There are two views as to when it was written. One view is that it was penned around 48 A.D., the other view says 55 A.D. The difference of the date is based on the when and where of the book. The early date is held by those who believe the recipients of the letter were in Southern Galatia in cities such as Derbe, Lystra and Antioch of Pisidia, which Paul founded on his first missionary journey (**Acts 13:14-14:24**). Sir William Ramsey was a proponent of this view along with others.

The 55 A.D. date (no earlier than 52 A.D.) is held by those who believe the letter was written to people living in northern Galatia and claims that the letter was composed on Paul's second missionary journey (**Acts 15:30-17:34**). Scholars are divided on this date. The early date would make it one of the first, if not the first, New Testament book.

Regarding this debate, the Bible Knowledge Commentary writes,

**"A debate has raged for centuries over whether Paul wrote his Galatian letter to Christians living in northern or southern Galatia. The North Galatian theory held that Paul visited the geographical district of Galatia in the north and established churches there. This church-planting ministry would have taken place on Paul's second missionary journey after he left the southern Galatian region and before he came to Troas (cf. Acts 16:6-8). A second visit to the northern territory is apparently described in Acts 18:23.**

**The South Galatian theory was advanced by Sir William Ramsay. In this view the churches addressed in the epistle were those of Derbe, Lystra, Iconium, and (Pisidian) Antioch, cities Paul visited initially on his first missionary journey (cf. Acts 13-14). Thus while there is no**

**account in Scripture of churches having been established in North Galatia, even on the second missionary journey, churches were established in South Galatia, according to Acts.**

**Other arguments which tend to favor the South Galatia theory are that the main roads from Paul's hometown of Tarsus pass directly through the cities of South, not North Galatia; the Judaizers were not likely to bypass the southern cities for the northern cities; a large Jewish element which could be addressed by the Judaizers lived in the southern cities; representatives of South Galatia accompanied the offering for the poor in Jerusalem but none were from North Galatia (cf. Acts 20:4); Barnabas who is mentioned but not introduced (cf. Gal. 2:1, 9, 13) would not have been known by the believers in the northern cities since he traveled with Paul only on the first journey. For these and other reasons many New Testament scholars now favor the view that Paul wrote the Galatian letter to Christians in the cities of South Galatia.”**

Also note that in dealing with the legalists in the region of Galatia Paul makes no mention of the Jerusalem council, which had a huge part in stemming the tide of legalism in the early church. That event in **Acts 15** is dated around 49 A.D. and Paul, I believe, would have mentioned the council in this book because of the importance of the meeting in Jerusalem.

**Who Was It Written To:** It was written to the churches of Galatian (**Gal. 1:2**) and the Galatians (**Gal. 3:1**). The word “Galatians” comes from the Gaul’s, a Celtic people. The Christians there were converts of Paul (**Gal. 1:11**) who were being confused by legalists who were trying to add to the Gospel of grace (**Gal. 2:4; Gal. 3:2**).

**Why Was It Written:** **One**, Paul wanted to refute legalism and teach justification by faith alone (**Gal. 3**). **Two**, he desired to establish for his readers the Christian freedom that they have in Christ, and that they are free from the law (**Gal. 4-5**). **Three**, he wanted to explain and defend his apostleship to the Gentiles (**Gal. 1-2**).

**Breaking Down Galatians – The Defense Of The True Gospel** is seen in **1:1-2:21**. The next section is **Freedom From Legalism** in **3:1-4:31**. The last section is **Freedom To Love And Serve** in **5:1-6:18**.

## **1. Defense Of The True Gospel – Gal. 1:1-2:21**

**A) Gal. 1:1-4** is Paul’s greeting to the church. He notes that his apostleship came from God alone (**vs. 1**). Obviously there were those challenging his apostleship.

Note what **vss. 3-4** says about the work of Christ. This is an immediate frontal attack by Paul against legalism. Paul writes that the Lord Jesus Christ gave Himself for our sins (Christ was our substitute and took our place on the cross) to deliver us from the present evil age. This was according to the will of God. Note that it is completely the work of Jesus alone that does that.

Martin Luther, in *Luther's Commentary On Galatians*, writes regarding vs. 4,

**“This passage, then, bears out the fact that all men are sold under sin. Sin is an exacting despot who can be vanquished by no created power, but by the sovereign power of Jesus Christ alone.”**

Luther also wrote regarding vs. 4,

**“For if our sins could be removed by our own efforts, what need was there for the Son of God to be given for them? Since Christ was given for our sins it stands to reason that they cannot be put away by our own efforts.”**

**B) Gal. 1:6-10** are Paul's strong words regarding anything other than the true Gospel. Paul says he was amazed that his readers are so quickly deserting (to desert from one person or thing to another) in vs. 6.

Note the word “different” in vs. 6. This is the word “heteros” from which we get “heretic.” The word means “another of a different kind, of a different nature.” Paul says that the Galatians were being turned by a different Gospel than he had preached to them.

In vs. 7 Paul makes it clear that there is not “another Gospel.” There were those who wanted to distort the truth of the Gospel. Paul makes it clear that there is only one true Gospel.

In vs. 8-10 Paul says that if anyone comes preaching a different Gospel, even if is an angel, let them be “accursed.” This word has the idea of something being devoted to God for destruction, with no hope of being redeemed. Obviously if a false teacher were to repent they could be saved but the teaching of a false gospel is strongly attacked in this book.

**C) Gal. 1:11-24** is a short history of Paul and that he was called to his ministry by God Himself. He was not out to please men but he was focused on honoring God.

**Vs. 12** says he received the Gospel through the revelation of Jesus Christ. When did that happen we cannot be positive. Note what the **Life Application New Testament Commentary** says,

**“We do not know the extent or manner of this revelation. Paul could be referring to his vision of Christ on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-6), to the time after Ananias returned Paul's sight (Acts 9:17-19), to the three years spent in Arabia (Galatians 1:17-18), or to his ongoing contact with Christ in his ministry (Acts 9:19-22; 22:17-18). Paul was probably referring to something more than his Damascus road experience.**

**Paul didn't say it, but he implied at this point: “How can anyone doubt my authority? How can anyone doubt the divinely revealed truth about Jesus Christ?”**

He relays the fact the Galatians knew about how he persecuted the church (vs. 13-14), but God had a different plan for Paul's life (vs. 15-16). Paul was “set apart” before he was born (vs. 15),

“called” by God’s grace (**vs. 15**), and it pleased God to reveal His Son to Paul in order that he would preach to the Gentiles (**vs. 16**).

Note in **vss. 16-18** Paul makes the point that he went into Arabia and then returned to Damascus before going to Jerusalem. What is the timeframe here? Well, in **vs. 18** Paul makes it clear that after his conversion he spent three years in Arabia and Damascus, no doubt meditating on Scripture, studying, praying, and learning God’s truths.

The **Life Application New Testament Commentary** suggests the following timeline for these events recorded here in **vss. 16-18**,

- **On his way to Damascus to imprison Christians, Saul was confronted by Christ and converted.**
- **Journeying on into Damascus, Paul waited until he was contacted by Ananias, who prayed for his healing and arranged for his baptism.**
- **Paul began preaching about Jesus in the synagogues of Damascus (Acts 9:20). He left clear evidence of his conversion before he went into Arabia.**
- **Paul retreated into Arabia (Galatians 1:17). This retreat into solitude consolidated and integrated the central change in his life with the rest of his experience and training.**
- **Three years pass. During that time, Paul left Damascus twice: first to spend time alone in Arabia, second to avoid plotters against his life and visit Jerusalem. Paul’s escape from Damascus fits better at the end of the three-year time period than shortly after his conversion. The Pharisees were probably upset by Paul’s desertion from their ranks and the effect that he had on their numbers within the city after a while.**

**Vss. 18-24** shares who Paul went to see and interacted with. God was glorified because of the change that He had brought in Paul’s life.

**D) In Gal. 2:1-10** Paul continues explaining his ministry. Acts records five trips Paul made to Jerusalem. The one noted here is most likely the famine visit (**Acts 11:27-30**). Note at that time he had Barnabas and Titus with him. He and Barnabas would split ranks (**Acts 15:36-41**) right after the Jerusalem council.

False teachers were at work at Jerusalem but Paul refused to listen to them (**vss. 3-5**). Notice that the apostles and the Jerusalem church, highlighting their view of salvation by grace alone, refused to make Titus follow the OT law (**vs. 3**).

**Vss. 6-10** shows more support for Paul’s ministry. **Willmington’s Bible Handbook** states regarding these verses,

**“When the church leaders and apostles in Jerusalem realized how God had blessed Paul's outreach to Gentiles, they commended his work, requesting only that he ask Gentile believers to help the famine-stricken Jewish Christians...”**

